

# The Bad Plus Does the Body Good <sup>[1]</sup>

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Archived Story <sup>[2]</sup> | October 10th, 2007

Minneapolis is known for contributing a diverse selection of bands to popular music. Among the many folk and rock artists that constitute the area's music scene exists a band defying the conventions of yet another genre. Progressive jazz trio The Bad Plus have instated themselves as one of the most forward thinking groups in experimental music. The Bad Plus push the boundaries of musical form by taking uninhibited jazz improvisation and wrapping it around traditional structure. What is created is music that is at one point as catchy as any pop song, but at another is pushing the boundaries of the avant-garde. What starts as a structured collaboration may, without warning, plunge into an uncontrolled spiral of chaotic improvisation, continuing past the point of any recognizable form, then, impossibly, returning to rationality. Each of the three musicians that constitute The Bad Plus are masters of their craft, capable of pushing both their instruments and their genre to the limits. With their love for rock music and their ability to play complex improvisational jazz that brinks on the edge of insanity, The Bad Plus create a sound that varies from friendly and familiar euphony to frightening and chaotic mayhem.

Their new album, *Prog* was released in May, and brought the best of their many influences together. More structured and less avant-garde than past collections, *Prog* offers a holistic definition of the band in a package that is as appealing to mainstream audiences as it is to jazz junkies. It contains covers of rock songs, such as Bowie's "Life on Mars," combined with beautiful original content. Of special note is the slow-moving cover of Tears for Fear's "Everybody Wants to Rule the World," which throws an entirely new light on the lovable 80's pop song. Unfortunately, with a band so based around improvisation, it becomes impossible to recreate their live sound with an album. *Prog* while being an extremely impressive album in its own right, fails to be the same awe-inspiring experience that is their performance.

To really appreciate the genius of The Bad Plus, attending a concert is a must. Watching them live in the Guthrie on Tuesday, September 25th, it was hard to separate the instrument from the player, as if they were bound inextricably together, fused as a singularity that was spewing out music inhumanly complex and devastatingly beautiful. The spectacle raised the question: If the musician was playing the instrument, what was playing the musician? Fingers tap danced across piano keys or plucked bass strings with the precision and delicacy of a spider weaving a web. The bassist was clutching his upright as if the force of their sound would blow him away. The face of the percussionist was contorted into some sort of conversational expression, as if he were verbally instructing his limbs. Sometimes he would look surprised at what his arms were doing, while other times he seemed to drift in and out, occasionally making sure the rest of his body was still playing. His style was so uninhibited and appeared so uncontrolled, it seemed that if he were catapulted into a drum set, the resulting crash would be in 4/4 time.

The Bad Plus represents yet another Minnesota contribution to music. For a state lacking the benefit of eternal summer or the freedom of a border open to an endless stretch of ocean, we refuse to be denied our own voice in a choir that's so exclusive to the coasts. California might be pretty, but music comes from the heart, and The Bad Plus make the beat of Minneapolis just a little more powerful.

1. <http://www.wakemag.org/sound-vision/the-bad-plus-does-the-body-good/>
2. <http://www.wakemag.org/author/archivedstory/>